



Jacob Kamaras <jkamaras@stellarjaypr.com>

oped suggestion via the San Diego Jewish World

1 message

Jacob Kamaras <jkamaras@stellarjaypr.com>

Sun, Dec 27, 2020 at 2:44 PM

To: Joe Gandelman <gandypro@gmail.com>

Hi Joe,

How are you? The San Diego Jewish World posted my oped on the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict yesterday, and I thought you might be interested in republishing the piece in TMV via your content-sharing arrangement:

<https://www.sdjewishworld.com/2020/12/24/religious-freedom-and-azerbajians-victory-in-nagorno-karabakh/>

Below (and attached), I've included the text for a modified version of the column which removes some of the Jewish-themed content that your readership might consider too niche. But if you prefer the original version that the Jewish World published, by all means go ahead and use it. I've also disclosed my client within the bio, for transparency.

Please let me know if you're interested in running this oped, and thanks so much as always for your consideration!

Many thanks,
Jacob Kamaras

Azerbaijan's historic victory in Nagorno-Karabakh and commitment to religious freedom

By Jacob Kamaras

In the international arena, birthday wishes can carry far more than ceremonial meaning.

Former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni [on December 23 wished a happy birthday to Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev](#), praising Aliyev for leading Azerbaijan “through national and international challenges.” Two days later, former Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog [expressed hope to Aliyev](#) “that the strategic cooperation between Israel and Azerbaijan will continue to develop and grow.”

These remarks follow last month's historic events in Eurasia's South Caucasus region. On November 10, Armenia signed a surrender document which ended a six-week war with Azerbaijan. According to the Russian-brokered ceasefire, Armenia agreed to withdraw from territories in Nagorno-Karabakh which it had occupied for three decades, while Russian peacekeepers are now patrolling the region. Through its victory in the war, Azerbaijan has regained control of approximately 20 percent of its internationally recognized territory.

[Four U.N. Security Council resolutions](#) affirm the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Azerbaijan. According to the UNHCR (the U.N. refugee agency), more than 620,000 Azerbaijanis [were displaced](#) from their homeland in Nagorno-Karabakh and only now have an opportunity to return following the end of Armenian occupation.

Of particular significance to Azerbaijanis is reclaiming Shusha, the city once known as [“the Conservatory of the Caucasus,”](#) which had fallen to the Armenian occupation in May 1992. Under its

previous era of Azerbaijani control, Shusha grew to become a significant political, economic, and cultural center in the region.

The recent war over Nagorno-Karabakh was instigated on September 27 when Armenian armed forces, using large-caliber weapons, mortar launchers, and artillery, launched attacks against positions of Azerbaijan. Yet media commentators commonly described Azerbaijan as the [“aggressor”](#) during the war, and they continue to do so following the conflict. Armenia is generally [depicted](#) as an ancient, tiny Christian nation under threat from Muslim-majority Azerbaijan in a war between religions.

Claims of religious warfare in Nagorno-Karabakh disregard Azerbaijan’s status as a [pioneer in developing Muslim relations with the Jewish community and Israel](#), and according to Gallup, [one of the world’s most secular countries](#). This past April, Rev. Johnnie Moore, commissioner of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), issued a dissenting opinion on the recommendation in USCIRF’s [2020 report](#) to include Azerbaijan on the State Department’s “Special Watch List” for violators of religious freedom. Moore’s dissent noted that Azerbaijan “is a country where Sunni and Shi’a clerics pray together, where Evangelical and Russian Orthodox Christians serve together, and where thriving Jewish communities enjoy freedom and total security in their almost entirely Islamic country.”

The Southern California-based pastor added, “Azerbaijan has had the challenge of bringing religious freedom into a post-Soviet legal framework, but — even in this — it has achieved much more than any of its neighbors.”

While accusations of “cultural genocide” against Nagorno-Karabakh’s churches and Christian heritage have followed Azerbaijan since the end of the war, Azerbaijani presidential foreign policy advisor Hikmet Hajiyev noted that during its three decades of independence, Azerbaijan “has shown the world its commitment to restoration of our multi-faith heritage.”

“Baku’s Armenian cathedral, damaged in the chaos of 1990, has been fully restored, now housing a library of some 5,000 precious Armenian manuscripts,” Hajiyev [wrote](#) for *The Washington Times*. “The head of the Armenian Church has been a welcome visitor to the cathedral. A new, Catholic cathedral has been constructed on land donated by the government, and opened by the pope. Old synagogues have been restored and re-opened, and new Jewish schools have been built.”

Further, Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov [said this week](#) that Azerbaijan “is determined to reintegrate citizens with Armenian origin living in Nagorno-Karabakh into the country’s social and economic space.”

In 2017, Azerbaijan hosted its annual Formula 1 Grand Prix race [on the eve of Eid al-Fitr](#), the holiday that marks the end of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan. That convergence of religious and secular festivities is strongly indicative of Muslim-majority Azerbaijan’s prioritization of religious freedom. In fact, Azerbaijan was the first parliamentary republic to be established in the Muslim world. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was founded in 1918 and collapsed in 1920 when Vladimir Lenin’s Russia invaded Azerbaijan. In 1991, Azerbaijan regained independence with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Former Israeli official Livni, meanwhile, emphasized in her aforementioned comments that Azerbaijani religious tolerance is “a source of inspiration to many.”

La Jolla, California, based public relations executive Jacob Kamaras is a former editor-in-chief of the Jewish News Syndicate (JNS). This article is [reprinted from San Diego Jewish World](#) which, along with The Moderate Voice, is a member of the San Diego Online News Association.

-30-

This material is distributed by Stellar Jay Communications on behalf of the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.



Azerbaijan analysis - TMV version.docx

21K